Making Peace with War: The National Security Complex and the American Purpose

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Introduction

An aversion to standing armies was long part of the American heritage. "On the smallest scale," observed James Madison, a standing force "has its inconveniences. On an extensive scale, its consequences may be fatal. On any scale it is an object of laudable circumspection and precaution."[1] The experience of World War II and then the Cold War made the United States throw such precautions to the winds. A large and permanent military establishment became part of the accepted order of things. Though the dreadful experience of the Vietnam War checked the growth of the military establishment, this effect was temporary. Given renewed impetus by the Reagan administration, Congress lavished funds on a revitalized military in the 1980s. The end of the Cold War left the United States without a "peer competitor," with U.S. military spending reaching to nearly half of total military spending worldwide. The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 then gave a powerful boost to the growth of the military establishment and the national security state.

[1] *Federalist* No. 41, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Clinton Rossiter (New York: Mentor, 1961 [1787-1788]), 257.

It is difficult not to feel ambivalence both toward the entrenchment of the national security complex and toward the emergence of the United States as the dominant military power in the world. The American-led world order, as international orders go, is more peaceful and prosperous than any other in world history.[2] From isolated pockets in the international system, liberal democracy has expanded to encompass large sections of the globe. Variants of market capitalism prevail almost everywhere. A set of ideas concerning human rights and democracy has demonstrated worldwide appeal. And yet the price of this expansion has also been substantial. As America has transformed into a warfare state, its institutions have undergone a degree of militarization that is alarming when considered in relation to traditional conceptions of the American purpose. Its international behavior, especially during the last decade, has been reckless to a degree unparalleled since the creation of the post-World War II national security state.

These developments point to a profound predicament with respect to the American role in the world: on the one hand, American military power, when defensively arrayed, has made an important contribution to the creation and maintenance of this relatively peaceful international order; on the other hand, the abuses to which it has been subject have made it hazardous to maintain large forces that constitute a perpetual temptation to employ them in war. The predicament is that there is no apparent way to resolve the question—that is, to provide the benefits of the defensive array without making the nation vulnerable to offensive uses, in effect hitching what might otherwise be a perfectly reasonable aim with what are patently illegitimate objects.

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[2] See Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York: Viking, 2011).

Conceived in Peace

In distant days, it was thought that a central purpose of America was to seek "by appeals to reason and by its liberal examples to infuse into the law which governs the civilized world a spirit which may diminish the frequency or circumscribe the calamities of war, and meliorate the social and beneficent relations of peace."[3] Among the most commonly expressed ideas of the late eighteenth century was one that saw a close connection between despotic governments and war. As a free constitutional republic, America was to chart a different course.

The Founding generation had great experience in war, and gave extensive consideration to the issues raised by armed conflict. None of the founders was a true pacifist, preferring peace to war in every instance. In their view, the American Revolution was the paradigmatic case of the just and defensive war. At the same time, the philosophy of civil freedom they articulated and even, in some instances, invented, was one heavily imbued with skepticism about the justifications often given, and utilities forecast, for the decision to resort to force. While accepting that war would sometimes be necessary, and that a universal and perpetual peace was an unrealizable dream of philosophers, the Founders also understood that war inescapably poses a threat to fundamental republican values and often involved its authors in unexpected calamities. The history of the European state system was replete with instances in which war had strengthened the monarch against popular power. That Europe had precious few republics—and much warfare—had a causal rather than merely contingent relation. James

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3 James Madison, Eighth Annual Message, December 3, 1816, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1789-1897* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1900), 1: 580.

Madison explored that theme in many places, but most succinctly in his *Political Observations* of 1795:

> Of all the enemies to public liberty, war is, perhaps, the most to be dreaded, because it comprises and develops the germ of every other. War is the parent of armies; from these proceed debts and taxes; and armies, and debts, and taxes are the known instruments for bringing the many under the domination of the few. In war, too, the discretionary power of the Executive is extended; its influence in dealing out offices, honors, and emoluments is multiplied; and all the means of seducing the minds are added to those of subduing the force of the people. The same malignant aspect in republicanism may be traced in the inequality of fortunes and the opportunities of fraud growing out of a state of war, and in the degeneracy of manners and of morals engendered by both. No nation could preserve its freedom in the midst of continual warfare.[4]

Madison believed that the propensity toward war was strongly heightened by certain internal institutions—monarchy, aristocracy, "funding systems"—that created a profound disjunction between those who gained, and those who lost, from war. Republics, he argued, would be far less bellicose than monarchies, but would not themselves be immune to that tendency because they could borrow money for warlike enterprises. "Each generation," Madison proclaimed, "should be made to bear the burden of its own wars, instead of carrying them on, at the expence of other generations." Then the people would proceed more cautiously. "Were a nation to impose such restraints upon itself, avarice would be sure to calculate the expenses of ambition." [5]

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[4] James Madison, "Political Observations," *Selected Writings of James Madison*, ed. Ralph Ketcham (Indianapolis: Hacket, 2006), 236.

[5] James Madison, "Universal Peace," *James Madison: Writings*, ed. Jack N. Rakove (New York: Library of America, 1999), 506-07.

"Independence and Union" was the motto of early American statecraft. Though America was separated from the European system by the Atlantic Ocean, the seas were in those days both a barrier and a highway, and in fact the larger experience of the non-European world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was domination by European powers. The United States was determined to avoid that fate, and thus "independence" entered its lexicon as a key concern and value. At the same time, however, the manifest differences among the states and sections suggested that North Americans could easily slide into war amongst themselves. Indeed, what really drove constitutional thought in this era was the fear that there would develop in North America, in the absence of union, a war system that would mirror Europe's own. To avoid that fate was the great problem faced by the Philadelphia Convention. It was brilliantly articulated by Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison in the *Federalist*, as they enumerated the potential sources of conflict among the states in the absence of a strengthened union. The American Constitution was, in fact, a kind of peace pact, whose fundamental rationale and purpose was to discover the institutions that would make possible the peaceful reconciliation of disputes. Now at last, claimed James Wilson in his celebrated defense of the Constitution, "is accomplished, what the great mind of Henry IV of France had in contemplation, a system of government, for large and respectable dominions, united and bound together in peace, under a superintending head, by which all their differences may be accommodated, without the destruction of the human race!"[6]

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[6] James Wilson's Summation and Final Rebuttal, *The Debate on the Constitution*, ed. Bernard Bailyn (New York: Library of America, 1993), 1: 866. See discussion in David C. Hendrickson, *Peace Pact: The Lost World of the American Founding* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003).

When he became president, Thomas Jefferson warned that "sound principles" would not justify taxing "the industry of our fellow citizens to accumulate treasure for wars to happen we know not when, and which might not perhaps happen but from the temptations offered by that treasure."[7] Experience showed, however, that professions of peace had to be tempered by a willingness to respond to aggression. Jefferson lamented in 1806 that "The love of peace which we sincerely feel and profess, has begun to produce an opinion in Europe that our government is entirely in Quaker principles, and will turn the left cheek when the right has been smitten. This opinion must be corrected when just occasion arises, or we shall become the plunder of all nations."[8] Jefferson did not want war, and in fact he sought, even when refusing to turn the other cheek, to retaliate through economic sanctions rather than armed force, finding in that method "another umpire than arms" for the disputes among the nations.

Jefferson's great opponent, Alexander Hamilton, never had much use for such ideas, believing that a war of commercial retaliations with Great Britain would ultimately end with a real war. He was an advocate of military preparedness, while ever seeking to "combine energy with moderation." He did not think republics were especially peaceful, noting that there had been almost as many popular as kingly wars. But he, too, feared the domestic consequences of a resort to war. Were the United States to slide into war with one of the European powers, he warned, "in the fermentation of certain wild opinions, those wise, just, and temperate maxims which will forever constitute the true security and felicity of a state

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[7] Thomas Jefferson, "First Annual Message," *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1789-1897* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1900), 1: 328.

[8] Cited in Reginald C. Stuart, *The Half-way Pacifist: Thomas Jefferson's View of War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 35.

would be overruled and that a war upon credit, eventually upon property and upon the general principles of public order, might aggravate and embitter the ordinary calamities of foreign war."[9] Like the Jeffersonians, Hamilton saw peril to the nation's basic institutions as ensuing from the resort to war. He, too, was astonished "with how much precipitance and levity nations still rush to arms against each other...after the experience of its having deluged the world with calamities for so many ages."[10] George Washington agreed: for the sake of humanity, Washington noted, it was "devoutly to be wished, that the manly employment of agriculture and the humanizing benefits of commerce, would supersede the waste of war and the rage of conquest; that the swords might be turned into plough-shares, the spears into pruning hooks, and, as the Scripture expresses it, 'the nations learn war no more.'"[11]

In the generation that followed the Founding, American leaders continued to put forth a view of the Constitution that stressed its anti-militaristic features. Protesting the incursion of General Andrew Jackson into Spanish-held Florida in 1818 without executive or congressional authorization, Henry Clay said that the members of the "immortal Convention" had seen "that nations are often precipitated into ruinous war, from folly, from pride, from ambition, and from the desire of military fame." By "expressly and exclusively" granting the war power to Congress, the hope was to spare the United States "from the mad wars that have afflicted, and desolated,

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9 Alexander Hamilton, "The Defense No. 18," *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, ed. Harold Syrett et al 26 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961-79), 19: 300.

10 Alexander Hamilton, "Defense of the Funding System," *Hamilton Papers*, 19: 56.

11 George Washington, "Washington to Marquis de Chastellux," *George Washington: Writings*, ed. John Rhodehamel (New York: Library of America, 1997), 675.

and ruined other countries."[12] Were the United States to take up the cause of liberty and independence in other countries, wrote John Quincy Adams, "the fundamental maxims of her policy would insensibly change from *liberty* to *force*." Such a policy would involve the United States "in all the wars of interest and intrigue, of individual avarice, envy and ambition, which assume the colors and usurp the standard of freedom."[13] Peace was celebrated as the "true policy of this Republic" and "the animating genius" of American institutions.[14] As William Seward summarized the case in 1844: "The first want of every nation is peace, the last is peace. It wants peace always. So our forefathers understood the philosophy of government; for they established a system which dispensed with even the forces necessary for perfect defence, rather than cumber it with such as might tempt it to unnecessary collision with other states."[15]

Made by War

While conceived in peace, it is undoubtedly also true that the United States has been made by war. The impact of war explains much of "who we are." It has profoundly shaped the development of American institutions. Its undeniable salience rises up like a specter to disturb the pacific professions of our leaders. This was true enough in the nineteenth century, when

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[12] Henry Clay, "On the Seminole War," *The Works of Henry Clay*, ed., Calvin Colton et al, 10 vols. (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1904), 6: 197.

[13] John Quincy Adams, *An Address Delivered . . . on the Occasion of Reading the Declaration of Independence* (Washington, D.C., 1821), 29.

[14] Robert Stockton, cited in David C. Hendrickson, *Union, Nation, or Empire: The American Debate over International Relations* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 187.

[15] William Seward, Speech at a Whig Mass Meeting, *The Works of William H. Seward*, ed. George E. Baker, 5 vols. (New York: Redfield, 1853-84), 1: 267.

the Mexican War vastly expanded the boundaries of the United States and the Civil War recast the federal union into an indissoluble national state. But it has been yet more dramatically true over the past seventy years. The Second World War, and then the ensuing Cold War with global communism, created a far greater standing complex of military forces than had existed at any previous time in American history, one that was further entrenched by the American response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

Among the central justifications for the military establishment is the contribution it has made to global security. For more than six decades, said President Obama in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, the United States "has helped underwrite global security . . . with the blood of our citizens and the strength of our arms."[16] Obama was merely restating a consensus already well entrenched, giving an overall perspective hardly different from the pronouncements of the first President Bush and President Bill Clinton in the 1990s. Obama was reticent to say so, but others have insisted that the United States has emerged as the world's *de facto* government—providing an array of public goods that the nations would have been incapable of securing on their own.[17] We have been, apparently, the inspiration, midwife, architect, and practical builder of this secure and peaceful world.

How convincing is this judgment? There are partisans on either side of the ideological wars who would answer this question wholly in the positive, or wholly in the negative, but neither position is convincing. The picture is mixed. It surely

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16 Remarks by the President at his Acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize, White House Press Office, December 10, 2009.

17 Michael Mandelbaum, *The Case for Goliath: How America Acts As the World's Government in the 21st Century* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005).

cannot be denied that the American-led world order has positive accomplishments to its credit. The post-World War II reconstruction of Europe, to which the United States made a vital contribution, was undoubtedly the grandest achievement. In Asia, especially in the years since the end of the Vietnam War, the willingness of the United States to open its market to exports has resolved what would otherwise have been an impossible dilemma for Japan and the neo-mercantilist developing countries that followed in Japan's wake. In both regions, American power created the space within which Germany and Japan marginalized a once dominant military sector. As far as the pacification of Europe and East Asia is concerned, the positive accomplishments of the post-World War II and Cold War eras continued into the post-Cold War period. The existence, since 1990, of what has been a significant measure of military unipolarity has made a state-led challenge to the order a dangerous enterprise for competitors to contemplate, much less directly undertake.

But although there have been positive accomplishments, there have also been grave drawbacks in American conduct. The Vietnam War was the most dramatic illustration of failures from the Cold War period, but a litany of other dubious enterprises scarred by hubris and accompanied by the inveterate tendency to exaggerate the dangers of the Communist menace. The military unipolarity that fell to the United States after the collapse of the Soviet Union then created an imbalance of power in the world political system and resulted, for us, in a series of imperial temptations. The victory of the United States over Saddam Hussein's Iraq in the first Gulf War in 1991 is invariably celebrated as a "good war," but the extremity of force employed in the war helped spawn the terrorist attacks of 9/11. The blowback was yet more severe for its being unrecognized—to bow to this particular reality was to put oneself in the "blame America first" camp.

Undoubtedly, the most egregious use of force over the past two decades was the 2003 Iraq War launched by President George W. Bush. The 2003 Iraq War struck directly at the prohibition against preventive war that had been the centerpiece of the twentieth century movement to outlaw war. In word and deed, we were far from the sentiments with which the American century was launched: that aggressive war was the crime of crimes. On the contrary, we seemed to have imbibed the spirit of revolutionary France, which, as Alexander Hamilton wrote two hundred years ago, had "betrayed a spirit of universal domination; an opinion that she had a right to be the legislatrix of nations; that they are all bound to submit to her mandates, to take from her their moral, political, and religious creeds; that her plastic and regenerating hand is to mould them into whatever shape she thinks fit; and that her interest is to be the sole measure of the rights of the rest of the world."[18] That spirit has moderated from its high watermark under the first term of the George W. Bush administration, but it has not disappeared.

Culturally, too, Americans made their peace with war. They have grown comfortable with war in ways that would have shocked the sensibility of earlier generations.[19] Brought up on a diet of video games and Hollywood spectacle, our young people—especially those attracted to military service—are saturated with violent imagery from an early age. Skill in the application of violence seems, according to sportscasters, celebrities, and politicians, to be at the pinnacle of human striving. Our soldiers, we are repeatedly told, "represent what

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[18] Americus, "The Warning I," *Works of Alexander Hamilton*, ed. Henry Cabot Lodge (New York, G.P. Putnam, 1974), 6: 233-34.

[19] The best study remains Andrew Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

is best in America." They are "a generation of heroes."[20] Everything they do, it seems, they do for freedom. In public ritual, patriotism has become identified almost exclusively with service to the national security state, no matter how remote the connection between our imperial wars and the preservation of our liberty—no matter, indeed, that imperial wars and the national security state threaten rather than preserve domestic liberty. We are to honor their sacrifice by reinforcing the very traits that got them killed.

The ugly effects of war are readily ignored. These effects are to be seen not only in the toll of the victims, measured in the anodyne term "collateral damage," but also among the agents of destruction—not only, that is, among those who are killed, but also among those who do the killing.[21] Perhaps the hyperbolic praise is a function, in part, of the unspoken knowledge that military service often results in awful psychological consequences for those who serve, making this over-the-top rhetoric a guilty expiation for the dehumanizing sins we ask soldiers to commit in the name of patriotism. Whatever the source, we are well along a road similar to that which Hamilton described, by which war leads to frequent infringements on the rights of the people, a condition that in turn weakens "their sense of those rights" and leads them "to consider the soldiery not only as their protectors, but as their superiors."[22]

In classical republican thinking, the danger of standing military establishments was that they would disorder republican institutions, leading to the usurpation of civilian rule. The step from considering the military as superiors to

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[20] President Obama, cited in Stacy A. Anderson, "Obama July 4th Speech," *Huffington Post*, July 4, 2012.

[21] See David Philipps, *Lethal Warriors: When the New Band of Brothers Came Home* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

[22] *Federalist* No. 8, Rossiter, 70.

thinking of them as masters, as Hamilton wrote, was "neither remote nor difficult." President Dwight Eisenhower was thinking in these classical terms when he warned of the acquisition of unwarranted influence by the military-industrial complex. "The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power," he observed, "exists and will persist." Military officers, it is true, are not more bellicose than their civilian superiors in our democracy, and sometimes they exercise (as with the prospect of a preventive war with Iran) an institutional restraint against the initiation of war, though their influence also seems to work towards the perpetuation of war once it has been launched. America's militarization also does not conform to the classic fears of a "garrison state," which featured a mobilized and regimented population. Instead of being enveloped by military norms and discipline, civilians live apart—and are increasingly separate—from the military, while elevating those who serve into icons. But if the militarization we have experienced does not exactly conform to older fears, it is no less a form of militarization. Instead of a mobilized population, we have gotten both the Surveillance State and the Emergency State.[23] Instead of a military caste hungering for military solutions to international problems, we have civilian elites who have hungered for those solutions, for whom the military has proved a dutiful servant.

There is much that is artificial and unbalanced about the U.S. role in the world. It goes to the very definition of

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[23] See Shane Harris, *The Watchers: The Rise of America's Surveillance State* (New York: Penguin, 2011) and David C. Unger, *The Emergency State: America's Pursuit of Absolute Security at All Costs* (New York: Penguin, 2012). The development confirms Hamilton's prediction that even "nations the most attached to liberty" would, if threatened by continual war, "resort for repose and security to institutions which have a tendency to destroy their civil and political rights. To be more safe, they at length become willing to run the risk of being less free." *Federalist* No. 7, Rossiter, 67.

republican government that such a regime should embody a governing apparatus of countervailing powers,[24] but there is no international equivalent to the separation of powers, judicial review, popular representation, and all the other devices that the Founders erected to preserve a balanced republican regime in the United States. From a republican standpoint, the assumption by one power of a "world government" role is scarcely justifiable; at a minimum, it holds out clear dangers. The mantra of U.S. leaders is that other powers should have a voice, but not a veto, over U.S. decisions regarding the use of force, even uses of force that otherwise would be illegal, whereas the essence of constitutional government is that it should provide not only for the use of power but also for its effective limitation and constraint. Keeping "all options on the table," as the United States has so often done, legitimizes offensive war in a fashion far removed from classic ideas of constitutional government. The rhetorical U.S. emphasis on partnership and cooperation with other liberal democracies, though appealing to what must be considered as virtues, has frequently not operated as a serious constraint on the use of force and has more than once emboldened "allies" to take provocative stances in the expectation of U.S. support. Georgia did it in 2008, with its invasion of South Ossetia. Britain and France did it in 2011 by agitating for intervention in Libya. China's neighbors do it over disputed territorial waters. Israel does it repeatedly.[25]

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[24] See Scott Gordon, *Controlling the State: Constitutionalism from Ancient Athens to Today* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), and Daniel H. Deudney, *Bounding Power: Republican Security Theory from the Polis to the Global Village* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

[25] See especially G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), and the critical review of Richard K. Betts, "Institutional Imperialism," *The National Interest*, no. 113 (May/June 2011): 85-96.

The Expansion of Force

The past two decades have also witnessed a dramatic expansion of the accepted justifications for the use of force. In the first half of the twentieth century, and even well beyond into the Cold War, the U.S. role was focused on the illegality of aggression. American leaders accepted the framework of a society of states that allowed for a plurality of regime types, and that united states in a framework of law that defended the idea of their mutual independence. Such was the central idea informing the U.N. Charter, and it is one that has been seriously weakened. It was essentially injured by the acceptance of preventive war against Iraq. The war on terrorism, too, has loosened, if not obliterated, these constraints. As a war with no apparent end, the war on terrorism has acquired a near-permanent character, making enemies of the state the object of drone strikes in a substantial number of countries, including Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Somalia. Sometimes these secret operations occur with the consent of the concerned states, sometimes not, but there is no mistaking the development of a permanent apparatus for the waging of secret war. It is based on a primitive calculus that virtually ignores the rage produced in societies that are the recipient of such strikes. Like the drug war, to which it bears many disturbing parallels, it purports to be the remedy for things of which it is itself the cause.

The expansion in justifications for the use of force can also be seen in the idea, heartily embraced by the George W. Bush administration, that force is a legitimate instrument for spreading democratic institutions. In his second Inaugural, President Bush declared that "the policy of the United States [is] to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world." Both the wars in Iraq

and Afghanistan had this as one of their purposes. Though the Obama administration has drawn back from such a crusade, the Bush Doctrine continues to find contemporary supporters. There are, however, no supporters to be found among the Founders for this project. It is not that the doctrine was unknown; on the contrary, the example of the French Revolution that soon followed, with its promise to "accord fraternity and assistance to all peoples who shall wish to recover their liberty," gave the issue unusual prominence, and both sides of the party debate during the immediate post-Constitution period rejected the underlying idea as an offense against the law of nations. Alexander Hamilton considered the French project repugnant to "the general rights of Nations [and] to the true principles of liberty." Thomas Jefferson, who, unlike Hamilton, strongly sympathized with the French Revolution, nevertheless acknowledged that "the French have been guilty of great errors in their conduct towards other nations, not only in insulting uselessly all crowned heads, but [in] endeavoring to force liberty on their neighbors in their own form."[26] Jefferson's view was that the first violation of the non-intervention principle had been made by the crowned heads of Europe, not the French revolutionaries. While the Founders did believe that the United States stood for a form of government that had universal relevance and that the political truths embodied in the Constitution were open, in principle, to all peoples, this belief existed happily alongside the idea that the United States had neither a right nor a duty to bring others to an appreciation of these truths through force. Rather than being contradictory, these ideas originated in the same school of thought. Like religious intolerance, the denial of legitimacy to other forms of government was seen to cause

[26] Hamilton and Jefferson are cited in Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson, *Empire of Liberty: The Statecraft of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 51.

perpetual war, and such a condition made for an international environment hostile to the spread of free institutions.

Yet another development that has expanded justifications for the use of force has been the growing acceptance in recent decades of a "responsibility to protect." Whereas preventive war was advanced almost furtively as a justification for U.S. intervention, disguised under the label of "preemption," the idea of intervention to protect imperiled populations has acquired much greater international legitimacy.[27] A 2005 U.N. General Assembly document recognizing a responsibility to protect was adopted unanimously, though with the proviso that any military action must take place under the auspices of the U.N. Security Council. It is safe to say that the American public is distinctly out of sympathy with intervention for this reason, but it remains as a potential justification for the use of U.S. military forces and it was the main justification for the 2011 intervention in Libya.

Genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity are evil deeds, and it is proper that the international community should look for ways to mitigate their reach or, in extreme cases, to put an end to them. At the same time, there are strong reasons for questioning the capacity to undertake and sustain interventions that satisfy the principle of proportionality—wherein the good done, or evil averted, by the use of force is greater than the evil produced by such use. One must also look with suspicion on the elasticity with which these humanitarian criteria are sometimes invoked, opening a potentially large wedge in justification of offensive uses of force. As a practical matter, it surely deserves notice that the humanitarian interventions most recently urged upon

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[27] Gareth Evans and Mohamed Sahnoun, co-chairs, *The Responsibility to Protect: Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty* (Ottawa, Canada: International Development Research Centre, 2001).

us—Libya, Syria, Sudan—are those that have arisen within or on the fringes of the Islamic world and are thus connected in subtle ways with the ongoing "war on terror" and an unspoken clash of civilizations. The record of western intervention does not, in some instances, lack plausible connections with resource imperialism. We may foreswear such selfish connections in theory, but in practice they often seem to govern official decisions.

Acceptance of a duty of humanitarian intervention also lends a patina of moral justification for the existence of a large and enduring military establishment, which has been and is likely to be employed for other purposes. If widely accepted, it would carry the nearly inevitable consequence of encouraging rebellion in the expectation of outside support, a consequence the more deeply to be feared insofar as uses of force *in anticipation of* humanitarian disaster are authorized. [28] While U.N. and regional peacekeeping operations, in which troops are dispatched to preserve a peace already made, have proved their utility in some instances over the last generation, humanitarian interventions that lead with the sword are far more dubious. The older rule forbidding such interventions, which embodied this traditional skepticism about the capacity of outsiders to resolve civil wars successfully, is of greater weight. Given the opposing considerations on either side—the felt need to "do something" in the face of humanitarian crisis, the no less imperative lesson of the disutility and unanticipated consequences of outside military intervention—perhaps it is inevitable that we should err. If so, it appears better to this observer to err on the side of caution.

Of all the expansions in justification for the use of force, the adoption of a preventive war rationale is the least tenable. The legal and moral norm against it arose from hard and bitter experience over the consequences produced by the aggressive

[28] Evans and Sahnoun, *The Responsibility to Protect*, 33.

use of force in the twentieth century, of which the two world wars were the ultimate symbol; the wisdom of that norm was once again confirmed by the results of the Iraq War. The preventive war rationale rests on images of the enemy that are fed by relentless propaganda and that, as also happened during the Cold War, read those enemies out of the human race. Only a public opinion that, through the miracles of modern military technology, imagines that it has been able essentially to immunize itself from the consequences of war would so easily entertain such ideas. The ease with which it is considered in the United States today testifies to the dangers of the enormous military establishment we have created. It virtually invites irresponsibility in the use of force.

A Way Out?

When the United States assumed its world leadership in the 1940s, no other power was better equipped, by dint of constitutional tradition and pacific bearing, to lead the world toward peace. Its Founders considered peace as the essential purpose and framework of America's basic institutions. Those "present at the creation" of the sweeping reorganization of world order after 1945 also saw the creation of institutions that would preserve international peace as their most pressing concern. They "rejected the idea of peace by universal empire or by the diplomatic juggle of the balance of power," adopting instead "the ideal of the cooperative peace—the ideal which is the great contribution of the Americas to world thought."[29] But while the United States did play a vital role in the creation and maintenance of the relatively peaceful order that arose out of the Second World War, that role has come at a high

[29] The expression is that of A.A. Berle, Jr., Assistant Secretary of State in the Franklin Roosevelt administration, "No, Says Berle," *The New York Times*, January 14, 1940.

cost. Our institutions have been militarized to an inordinate degree, certainly to an extent that would have alarmed the Founders of the United States. Our political culture celebrates war and warriors in unseemly fashion, and pushes out of sight and out of mind the wastage brought by our own uses of force. Our criteria for waging war has expanded broadly; considered alone, some of these expansions are not without justification—nothing in matters of war and peace is simple—but the multitude should strike us with alarm. The insensible shift in our maxims against which John Quincy Adams warned—from liberty to force—has taken place. We have become habituated to empire.

There is no easy solution to the predicament in which we find ourselves. The military establishment and national security state are facts of life; they are not going away. Contrary to the expectations of the Founders, Congress has proved a willing abettor of wars of folly. The economic crisis spawned by the 2008 financial crash, from which recovery has been anemic, has deepened the fatigue felt by the American people over the unexpected costs and failed objects of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but there has been little reconsideration of the overall place of the United States in the world and whether a different strategy could achieve essential national goals at far lesser cost. Avarice has not been made to calculate the expenses of ambition. The inability to pay for what we want, and to want only what we are willing to pay for—symbolized by trillion dollar budget deficits—has deepened since the Great Recession but this has not produced a serious push to reduce the overall size of the national security complex.[30] Indeed, in some respects, ambitions have expanded: the United States has become more vocal in opposition to China's territorial claims in its eastern and

[30] The formulation is drawn from Walter Lippmann, *U.S. Foreign Policy: Shield of the Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1943), 8.

southern seas, and the U.S. clearly intends to build up its presence in Asia. Progress was recorded by former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, when he observed that anyone who contemplates sending "a big American land army into Asia or into the Middle East or Africa should 'have his head examined,'" but an air and naval war in those places is not so self-evidently foreclosed.[31] It is very much "on the table" with regard to Iran, as reputed voices of sanity within both the Bush and Obama administrations have insisted. We may hope that the civilian leaders of the military establishment will confine themselves to defensive purposes and rein in the extravagant justifications for the use of force to which we have become accustomed. However, experience suggests that we are far from finished with such temptations.

For a free state, the maximization of power is a fatal objective for foreign policy. Constitutional democracies may be less subject to the abuse of power than other states, but they are hardly exempt from the frailties incident to human nature. The people of America, as Hamilton warned in *The Federalist*, are "remote from the happy empire of perfect wisdom and perfect virtue."[32] So they remain. Moreover, constitutional democracies have reason to fear not only threats from abroad, but also overly centralized power at home. In the long history of reflection on the security predicaments of free states, domestic hierarchy or tyranny is as significant a problem as international anarchy or conquest. That crucial theme, though missing from much contemporary academic writing on international politics, and missing, too, from the conduct of recent American statecraft, was at the core of the republican security theory to which America's Founding

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[31] Speech at West Point, quoted in Thom Shanker, "Warning Against Wars Like Iraq and Afghanistan," *New York Times*, February 25, 2011.

[32] *Federalist* No. 6, Rossiter, 59.

Fathers made such distinguished contributions.[33] That theory is far more sophisticated and relevant than contemporary ideas of domination and superiority, because it places the preservation of free institutions and the control of power at the core of its concern. We would do well to return to that insight.

[33] See Deudney, *Bounding Power*.

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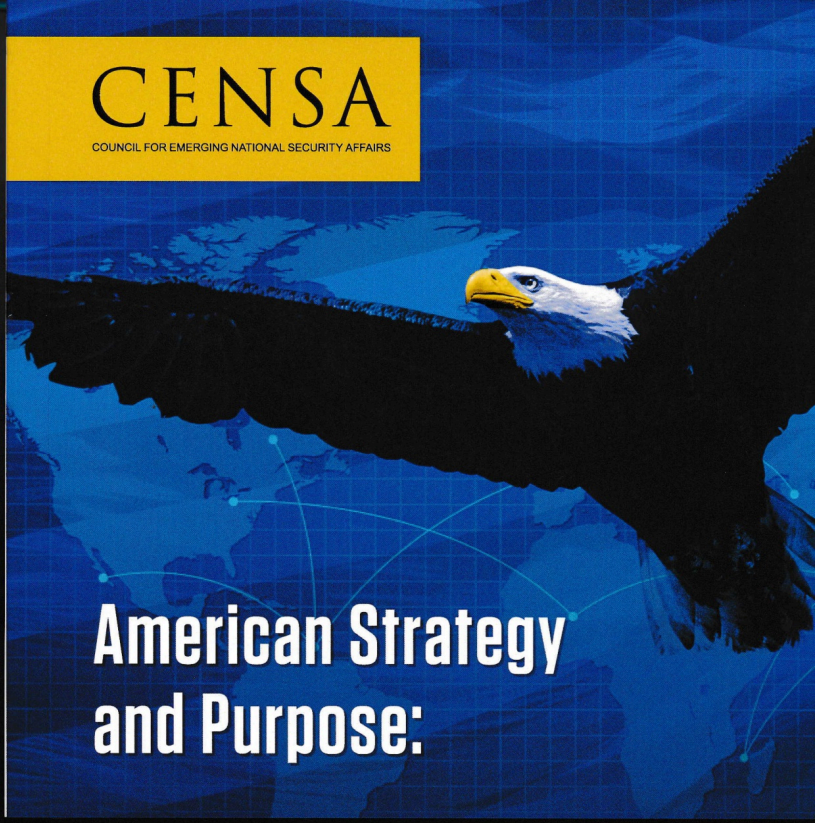

American Strategy and Purpose:

Reflections on Foreign Policy and National Security in an Era of Change.

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